

# N I N C

February 2011  
Vol. 22, No. 02

## Crowdsourcing: In the Crowd, or Leading It?

BY ASHLEY MCCONNELL

When Our Fearless Editor asked me if I'd be interested in doing an article about something called "crowdsourcing" for the NINC newsletter, I said, "Sure! Er, what is it?" Marianna sent me a few links, and I said, "Looks a lot like focus groups to me. But I'll see what I can find out."

As it turns out, it's a lot more than focus groups. The term was popularized by Jeff Howe in a June 2006 online edition of *Wired* magazine; Howe elaborated on it in a 2008 book called *Crowdsourcing: Why the Power of the Crowd is Driving the Future of Business*. In essence, crowdsourcing is about building a community that has an interest in some subject, and using it to generate content and support.

The examples Howe provides in his book are interesting to writers in a number of ways. The first example he provides is for an online T-shirt company called Threadless.com. The owners of the company invite visitors to their website to submit ideas for T-shirt graphics and slogans. They submit the best of these to the community to vote upon, and the winners receive a small prize. Meanwhile, Threadless.com sells the shirts.

Another example provided early on is iStockphoto.com. This company does the same thing, inviting visitors to submit stock photos, allowing them to vote on their favorites, and then selling them. In both cases, Howe observes, the company retains the intellectual property rights. All the contributors get out of it are bragging rights, and occasionally some small cash compensation if their bit is used. It's a nice deal for the company, and oddly, the contributors seem to be happy about it too.

Crowdsourcing has been cited as the technique used by research laboratories, which post problems online and invite viewers to try to solve them; by NASA in its collection of data about the universe; by entertainment sites (I hadn't thought of it as such, but LOLcats.com is definitely crowdsourced); by microlenders; and even by authors and publishers. In every case, a subject is put before a group of people—the larger the group, the better, which makes the Internet an excellent source for crowds—and invites them to participate in some way. Howe claims that this method allows for more diverse, more accurate, and in some ways more profound results than by relying solely on experts in their field. His argument is that there is so much untapped expertise and enthusiasm in the crowd, and that bringing people together to strike sparks off



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## Novelists, Inc.

FOUNDED IN 1989

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Address changes may be made on the  
website.

For members without Internet access,  
send changes to the Central Coordinator.

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## Introducing...

The following authors have applied for membership in NINC and are now presented by the Membership Committee to the members. If no legitimate objections are lodged with the Membership Committee within 15 days of this Nink issue, these authors shall be accepted as members of NINC. For further information or to recommend eligible writers, contact:

Membership Chair: JoAnn Grote  
PO Box 5, Le Sueur, MN 56058  
[jaghi@rconnect.com](mailto:jaghi@rconnect.com)

#### New Applicants:

Phoebe Belsley (Caroline Linden), Newton, MA  
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Janet Lane, Littleton CO  
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### NINC has room to grow...

Recommend membership to *your* colleagues.  
Prospective members may apply online at

<http://www.ninc.com>.

Refer members at [ninc.com](http://ninc.com). Go to Members Only,  
"Member Services" and click  
"Refer a New Member to NINC."

Take NINC brochures to conferences.  
Email Pari Taichert with your mailing address and  
requested number of booklets.  
[ptaichert@comcast.net](mailto:ptaichert@comcast.net).

### NINC Statement of Principle

Novelists, Inc., in acknowledgment of the crucial creative contributions novelists make to society, asserts the right of novelists to be treated with dignity and in good faith; to be recognized as the sole owners of their literary creations; to be fairly compensated for their creations when other entities are profiting from those creations; and to be accorded the respect and support of the society they serve.



## Watch this Space ... and the NINC website.

In early December, 2010, NINC sent out more than 150 Save The Date postcards to industry professionals. (They were really nifty postcards, by the way. The conference logo shows up very well—maybe we need that red “Writers In Charge” stamp on some T-shirts?) We sent one to everyone on our mailing list from 2010, and to a few new names.

In late January, we followed up those postcards with written invitations, and we’ll continue to send out invitations to any editor, agent, media consultant, or whomever members suggest we invite. Just send their names, snail mail ad-

resses to me, Kasey Michaels, at [kcmi@aol.com](mailto:kcmi@aol.com), and a letter will go out.

As I write this on only the second day of 2011, we can announce a few speakers, but there will be many more announced as we move along—many. Remember, 2011 is going to be all about *how* we do what we learned we need to do as we brainstormed the future of publishing at last year’s conference. Here’s where we get hands-on, nuts-and-bolts about the whole nine yards!

**Tonya Wilkerson, CPA**, NINC’s own Central Coordinator, will be there to help us set up the correct financial records to plan and run our own small businesses, incorporating in her talk how to be publishers. (We get to call ourselves publishers, you know, when we start putting up our backlist and new material in e-form on our own.). Tonya’s website is <http://www.varney.com/> NINC member Laura Phillips is collecting member questions to submit to Tonya. Send them to her at [laura@napdog.com](mailto:laura@napdog.com)

**Joan Schulhafer**, of **Joan Schulhafer Consulting**, is a veteran in the business of promoting books and authors and will be returning to Florida with us. We couldn’t be more delighted. Joan has spent her career working independently and as a key executive at Avon, Bantam, Simon and Schuster’s Pocket Books, Silhouette Books, and Kensington Publishing. She was instrumental in the launch of new genre and literary imprints including the prestigious science-fiction/fantasy line Eos. Her experience targeting the romance, mystery/suspense, science-fiction/fantasy, African-American, and GLBT audiences contributed greatly to a network of contacts that benefit her clients today. Through the years, Joan has worked with fiction and nonfiction titles in all formats—hardcover, trade paperback, mass market, and now e-books. Fiction in all formats is at the core of her business. <http://www.joanschulhafer.com/>

**David Wilk** is the head of **Booktrix**, an active consultancy, providing innovative and traditional book and marketing services to publishers, authors, and content owners. He has held executive positions in publishing, wholesaling, and distribution. Starting out as a writer, then an editor, book designer, and publisher, David has worked in the book industry for more than 30 years. He’s worked closely with hundreds of publishers in every aspect of distribution and sales, business development, marketing, and author relations. He has also worked closely with many authors and content developers to bring their works from concept or manuscript to successfully published and distributed books.

His knowledge of the “new reading habits, new distribution models” includes exploiting the best in websites, alternate business models, enhanced e-book publishing projects, even iPhone applications. We don’t yet know exactly what topics he’ll address (and we’ll then get to grill him about...) because the publishing world seems to change daily, not yearly anymore. Yes, it’s a new world out there! [www.booktrix.com](http://www.booktrix.com)

**Tracee Gleichner**, from **Pump Up Your Book**, is into the new promotion in a big way, helping authors arrange online book tours, blog tours, and so much more. But who wants to tour a bunch of blogs with ten or so readers? ►



*NINC is exploring the possibility of publishing back issues of the newsletter on the public page of the NINC website. If you have contributed to our newsletter in the past and do not wish your material used in this way, please contact the 2011 Nink Editor.*



We need to use our promotional time wisely. She'll explain not only how important an online presence is in today's markets, but how we can best achieve it, on our own, or with help. What's so nifty to me about virtual book touring (blog tours and such) is how affordable they are; you can be all over the Internet on your own dime, or hire one of these new, specialized pros for the price of maybe one plane ticket and hotel room, and never have to get out of your pj's! <http://www.pumpupyourbookpromotion.com/>

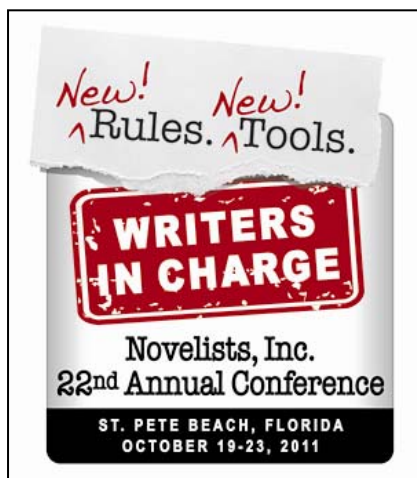
Many members met **Marc Milot** in Florida last year. Marc and his partners, Grammy-nominated producer Billy Hume and film director Johnny St. Ours, head up **Radiator Music**, a transmedia production company. They create original music and video content to "bring storyworlds to life across numerous media platforms." Is this the sort of thing we'll soon be seeing in enchanted e-books? Will e-book downloads soon be arriving with their own original soundtracks? Wow—heady stuff! See how this all can translate into book promotion; writers and publishers alike are investigating new options like these. Check out their website at [www.radiatormusic.com](http://www.radiatormusic.com)

**Scott Eagan**, representing the **Greyhaus Literary Agency**, signed up to attend the conference within days of receiving his Save The date postcard. Greyhaus is a small agency specializing in representing category romance and women's fiction authors only. He is based in Washington State. <http://www.greyhausagency.com/>

Something else we've added for the one-day program, *The New Publishing: Welcome To Tomorrow!* is our **NINC How-To Binder**. Members Meredith Efken and Kelly McClymer (along with some help from our friends) are compiling our own version of "Making It All Work." In it, for instance, we'll have screen shots and step-by-step directions in how to convert backlist to e-form, how to open an account and put a book up online; how to set up a Facebook page, how to get on and manage Twitter, on and on and on (you know, all the technical stuff that scares a lot of us silly).

Each conference attendee will receive one of these snazzy binders (including space to take notes during the workshops), and then we'll have all that same information up on the website for everybody else (but you'll have to download it and print it out, unless you come to Florida). So if you *know* what has to be done to keep viable in this new age of promotion, but you're still saying, "Sure—but *how* do I do all that ... and speak slowly, please, because I'm technically challenged," well then, this is your binder, and just might become your online promotional bible.

Remember, lots, lots, *lots* more speakers to be announced, and attending industry guests to be announced. So stay tuned, stay connected, and most of all, plan to get down and get current and all that good stuff by registering today to assure your place in Florida this October!



## **New Rules, New Tools: Writers In Charge October 19-23, 2011 Tradewinds Island Resort St. Pete Beach, Florida**

Fee: \$285

Payable in one lump sum or three payments of \$95

Special One-day program open to all  
writers and industry professionals:

## **The New Publishing: Welcome to Tomorrow! October 20, 2011**

Fee: \$150; includes lunch and dinner buffets

(NINC members: this cost is included in your conference fee)

Registration now open at [www.ninc.com](http://www.ninc.com)

# Crowdsourcing

*Continued from page 1* ▶ one another is so fruitful, that this is the natural problem-solving method of the future. But what does that mean for writers? Can one crowdsource a novel?

Well, he tried. In a project called Assignment Zero, Howe organized a website to solicit from the crowd topics of interest to readers of *Wired*, and then write articles about them. The best of these articles would actually be published in the magazine. In the process, Howe discovered some of the flaws of the technique.

Howe discovered that Sturgeon's Law ("90% of everything is crap") applies equally to crowdsourced content. He also discovered some important principles:

*It's not a crowd. It's a community.* The difference lies in the common interest of the group, whether it's funny pictures of cute kitties, T-shirt slogans, or providing investment cash to someone who wants to start a hot-dog stand.

*The community has to be invested.* If they get nothing out of it, they lose interest. While your community may not get money out of its investment of time and interest, if you expect members to contribute and go on contributing, you have to provide something of value in return. Often, this is simply recognition. Sometimes it's more material than that. Filmmakers who submit their work to YouTube may find themselves with a distribution deal for a larger work.

*The community has to be guided.* If there are no clear expectations, the subject disappears under a thrashing mass of crowd members dashing madly in all directions, and nothing gets done. In short order, the community falls apart.

*Not everyone in the community actively contributes,* comments, or votes on content; while every person who regularly watches a site or blog may feel some connection to it, only a very few will actually vote or comment, and only a very few of those will actually submit content.

And about that crowdsourced novel—[both Penguin and Avon Books have tried crowdsourcing novels](#) by creating wiki sites and inviting anyone interested to participate. The result was, apparently, fairly satisfactory for a one-time attempt, but it doesn't seem to be a method either publisher is eager to adopt as a permanent business model, even though they weren't planning to pay royalties to the 1,500 contributors. There seems to be a limit to the number of effective collaborators, and I suspect it has something to do with meeting deadlines—or perhaps the lack of editing (see item 3 above!) of the more than 1000 pages generated.

What publishers and writers have used with some success, however, is the crowdsourcing model to plan book tours, choose cover designs, and even to fund novels in progress. Some science fiction writers call this "writing for the tip jar," and one example is Lawrence Watt-Evans's *Ethshar* novels. When his publisher cancelled the line, [Lawrence decided to continue publishing the novels himself](#), and offered to post a chapter at a time on his website as readers contributed. Each chapter would be posted as contributions hit \$250. He's currently working on the third novel published this way. He has also created a wiki and invites comments: all typical crowdsourcing tools to develop that essential community.

Is writing for a tip jar the future of the novelist? While it remains a strategy we can use, I hope it's not the only one. We're in the business, not of selling books, but of selling an idea, a story. In some ways I think we're the crowd being sourced, the folks uploading T-shirt slogans at 80,000 words apiece. We're hoping for recognition from the rest of the crowd (and enough monetary feedback to make a living). We're told to create websites, start a blog, have a platform to make our content more noticeable, but according to *Time* magazine, there were 130 million blogs out there—and that's as of *last year*. (The upside of this may be that slush piles for traditional publishers will drastically shrink as wannabe novelists divert their energies to blogging and PublishAmerica; we can only hope.) We need to use crowdsourcing to make *ourselves* the go-to sites, the companies who create the communities.

We do this by creating something that the crowd wants (our books); allowing the crowd to feel like a community by providing a way for them to participate; and providing recognition. It sounds like heresy, but there's a reason that another example Jeff Howe uses is <http://www.harrypotterfanfiction.com>. That's a community with over 65,000 stories based on J. K. Rowling's seven novels. Those stories represent millions of fans who bought her books.

Marion Zimmer Bradley created a community with the Friends of Darkover, back in the late 1970s, which resulted in several anthologies. *Star Trek* spawned not only several follow-on series and movies, but hundreds of thousands of fan stories, plus an entire publishing line of "legitimate" published fiction that flourishes to this day.

Does that mean that you have to allow fanfiction based on your work? No, although if you've created a fascinating playground, it's hard to maintain "Keep Out" signs around it. You might, however, look at what Steve Miller ▶

and Sharon Lee have done with the [Liaden](#) universe. They've trademarked it. They also send out newsletters and actively post updates. They invite their fans to talk to them on their LiveJournal blogs, maintain Facebook presences, and even have a "trip" jar to encourage cash contributions for signings and appearances. I'm pretty sure there are T-shirts in there somewhere.

If you'd rather just write books, I sympathize. I'm a diehard Luddite myself. But if you want to create a community, make it worth the community's while. Encourage discussion on your blog by asking (and answering) questions of your readers. Recognize them. If all else fails, run a T-shirt slogan contest every few months, and make the prize a copy of the new book and the T-shirt. If crowdsourcing is going to work, you have to let the crowd be the source of something, whether it's stories or comments or images, and you have to appreciate that content. And above all, provide guidance—give your crowd, your community, a goal, whether it's creating the most comments on any blog anywhere or showing up at your signings. If we're not going to be just members of the crowd ourselves, we need to learn how to create and lead crowds of our own, and how to use them to survive as novelists.

*Ashley McConnell has written 17 fantasy, horror, and media tie-in novels and numerous short stories and nonfiction articles, and is currently working on an e-book project, and in her spare time maintains the Bloodstained Bookshelf, an online resource site for upcoming mystery publications. She figures she has two more cats to go to get her official Crazy Cat Lady certificate. A transplanted New Mexican, she now lives in the American South.*

## From the Editor . . . .

I'm delighted to announce the addition of another great column in our "Ask A..." series. NINC member and private investigator Colleen Collins has offered her expertise in a new "Ask A Private Investigator" column.

In addition to being an author and PI, Colleen is a writing instructor and blogger. Her *Guns, Gams, and Gumshoes* blog can be found at <http://writingpis.wordpress.com/> and was named one of the top three true-crime blogs in Bill Crider's column in *Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine* last August. Please send your questions for Colleen to me at [Marianna@MariannaJameson.com](mailto:Marianna@MariannaJameson.com) and we'll put her on the case! — **Marianna**

## Business Briefs

— Compiled by Sally Hawkes

### Consumer Electronics Show 2011

There are mixed reviews from the various sources about whether the products were a yawn or a wow at the Consumer Electronics Show in January. No matter, I would encourage NINC members to keep their eyes on what the telecommunication companies are doing with the new tablets and netbooks. Why? The same day the first CES Show reports were showing up in *PW*, I was attending a Chief Information Officer's Meeting where Sprint, Verizon, AT&T, and T-Mobile were doing presentations and it was all about cell phones and what you could do with tablets and netbooks. AT&T conducted a webinar from their smart phones. What does this mean to authors? It means more apps from publishers for smart phones, which are projected to be 50% of the phone market by the end of 2011. What about the other 50%? More text functions will be created. Run a Google or Bing search on CES to see what other gadgets were presented.

### Can't Catch This

January also brought an end to the issue of the North American release of *60 Years Later: Coming Through The Rye*, the unauthorized sequel to *Catcher in the Rye*. According to the settlement, no editions may be sold or distributed in the US or Canada until *Catcher in the Rye* enters the public domain, although rights have been sold to other territories and will not be blocked by the Salinger estate.

While all the terms of the final settlement agreement are confidential, it is noted that the author, Fredrik Colting, is barred from using "Coming Through The Rye" as part of the title and may not dedicate the book to Salinger. Additionally, neither the author nor the publisher may refer to *Catcher in the Rye* or Salinger in any promotions, nor can any promotional material mention that the book was banned by Salinger or make any reference to the litigation. Since J.D. Salinger's death in January 2010, his estate has maintained his long-standing refusal to allow adaptations of the book in any format—print, audio, television, stage, or film.

# Digital... Eventually

BY SHANNON DONNELLY

The current hot phrase in the publishing world is “Digital First”—meaning a book appears in electronic format before print. For those of us whose books came out in print first, diving into the digital world seems a lot like jumping out of an airplane when we’re used to sitting inside and letting others worry about the landings. Suddenly, we have to know a lot of stuff. We have to figure out covers and formats and ISBNs and promotion. How do you make that leap taking your print books into digital? There are as many right answers to that as there are eBook formats. Here’s my story; it might help you figure out your own digital path.

## RIGHTS

I’d sold and published eight Regency romances with Kensington; when those rights reverted to me, I was delighted. And confused. What now? Did I repackage the books? Resell the rights? Would any publisher be interested? I took a look around (yes, Google is my close friend); to be honest, I didn’t like the level of “publishing” that I saw for bringing out my backlist. The covers didn’t interest me, the promotion seemed low, and the opportunities just did not get my heart thumping in a good way. Two things happened that changed everything.

The first came from my own online background. I’ve been producing websites since 1994—the Dark Ages of the Web. While I kept an eye on the eBook market, eReaders always left me unhappy (too expensive, too bulky, too limited). But I kept watching. This past year, formats and numbers for eBook readers took off—we have the Kindle, the Nook, and the iPad exploding this trend. The prices are reasonable, and the formats work. And I’ve been feeling for a time as if I need to actually live in the place where I do live, meaning it’s time for me to move online.

The second trigger came from attending the NINC conference. It was fantastic to have authors from all formats, agents, and editors on the same panels. Everyone was talking about what was going on and I could actually put together a picture that made sense. JA Konrath shared his hard facts—his [blog](#) is worth following; Lou Aronica of [the Fiction Studio](#) provided great insight and info that only comes from his kind of experience in the publishing business; and Carolyn Pittis, Senior VP of Global Marketing Strategy and Operations for HarperCollins—How does that fit on a business card?—shared incredible stats. From all the info, three facts surfaced for me:

- 1) No one knows where digital is going to take us.
- 2) Now is a terrible time to be an author.
- 3) Now is a wonderful time to be an author.

Yep, the good news is the bad news. We have dangerous opportunities ahead of us: new doors opening, old ones closing, a changing world. And, since no one knows where this is heading, we might as well experiment. For me, this meant it was time for my backlist to stop being the cobbler’s children, stuck in the back room with no shoes to take them striding into the world. ALERT: If you’re afraid of technology or the Internet, don’t worry. It’s complicated and big, but getting easier and more accessible. What’s helped me the most is my willingness to dive in, pick up new things, break them, learn from mistakes, and keep on learning. But if you’re on the plane and afraid to jump out—or you’re about to be pushed out—you’ll need a helping hand. That’s available, too. But it all starts with having the goods in the first place: it starts with your story.

## STORY

Digital or print, “the word” is still the most important element. Everyone at the NINC conference agreed on this. Technology changes, but the importance of the actual words hasn’t changed since long before the Gutenberg press. Initially, when thinking about bringing my print books into digital format, I thought I’d keep them exactly as they were. Books reflect the author at a certain stage in life, and that alone can be interesting. But I couldn’t do it. As an author, I’ve improved my craft. I wanted to bring out the best product I could. This meant editing. While it’s slowed me down, it’s been a fascinating learning experience.

If your book is very old, or never had a good edit, getting your book into the best possible shape may mean hiring a copy editor. You might pay up to \$30 a page, or you might negotiate a flat rate. This is no place to economize, but if you know writers with strong copy-editing skills, you may be able to work a deal or even barter with them. (Note: I ►

believe everyone should make a decent wage, so I don't advocate paying someone less than their value. It's bad Karma.)

Once the edits are in, it's time to make the pages look pretty. Clean formatting is important. Smashwords, Amazon, and B&N offer free, detailed guides, but I like to keep it simple, so here's my advice:

First, put your book into a single Microsoft Word file. My chapters were split into multiple files, so this step involved a lot of cutting and pasting. I had electronic versions of my work, but not of the finished book. I could have scanned the books, but I chose to manually input my edits as part of the editing. Other alternatives include searching the Internet to see if someone's done the work for you (those pirate sites have a use); investing in a scanner and OCR (optical character recognition) software that converts the scanned image into text, which will cost about \$300 – \$400 for a full setup; or paying someone else to do the print book to electronic conversion for you for about two to three dollars per page. If you're going it on your own, I've posted [twelve steps for easy formatting](#) on my site. If you know what you're doing, you can get fancy about the formatting. Or you can even hire someone do to do the fancy stuff for you. While this sounds like a lot of work, it's not difficult. It just takes time, patience, and persistence, something every writer needs in buckets. I'm averaging two to three weeks to get a book formatted and that's working only weekends and evenings and doing all the edits.

Save your file as both a standard Word .doc or .docx file and as a .pdf file, which will enable you to give away free .pdf copies to readers and set up an ISBN. With your formatting done, you're set to move to the next set of materials you need—cover, copy, and promotional materials.

## COVER

Cover art is still the best way to make your story stand out in a crowd. Budget from \$300 – \$800 for each cover; there are options if that's above your budget. The point is to think about this as a business—you want to go with the best you can afford to help you get great sales. And keep investing in your work.

Initially, it was bad covers that put me off reselling my backlist to smaller presses bringing out Regency romances. Not only would I not buy those books, I didn't want anything I'd written to have a cover like that. (Call me shallow, but I've seen what great covers did to help my print sales). You can use stock images, do one yourself, or have a friend do one for you in PhotoShop. However, unless that friend is a pro, I recommend spending some up-front dollars to get a great cover. You can start out with a low-cost cover and put the money you make into a better cover later, or try contacting the cover artists who did your print covers. If they hold the rights, they can sell you electronic usage for a good deal. Also consider working with a local art school and use art from talented students.

I use [Albert Stark](#)—he's a great guy and he did a couple of my best covers, including my RITA-nominated book. JA Konrath urges folks to hire his cover artist, [Carl Graves](#). His covers really pop. If you're not sure who to use, ask around. But keep money in your production budget for this one.

Once you have your cover finalized (with your name, the title, and any quotes or promo on the front), produce the cover in several sizes. You'll want smaller ones for promotional spaces, and larger ones for sites that allow larger images. I usually produce images in four sizes: 750x1200, 500x800, 300x500, and 120x200. There's room for flexibility; these don't have to fit printer guidelines. Keep the file sizes under 1–2 MB (small files load fast—always a good thing online); the .jpeg format works best.

## COPY

You'll want a couple of versions of promotional copy. Smashwords allows both short descriptions of up to 400 characters, and long descriptions of up to 4,000 characters to describe your book. Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing, formerly known as Digital Text Platform, also allows 4,000 characters. B&N's PubIt allows a generous 5,000 characters. Use up all that space—your existing fans might know your work, but to reach a new audience, you need good copy. The nice thing is that you can change and update the copy (and the cover) if something's not working.

While you're putting your book copy together, also create your bio, website and blog accounts, Twitter account, and Facebook page. If you have reviews, assemble them in one file (trust me, it will make your life easier). It's also a good idea to decide now if you want to buy an ISBN or not.

## ISBNs

The ISBN is an industry standard for identifying a book. If you post your book to Smashwords, they can provide an ISBN, but they will be listed as the publisher. If you want full control of your book listing, buy your own ISBNs, which you can do through Bowkers at [www.myidentifiers.com](http://www.myidentifiers.com). Why buy one? Some eReaders, such as Apple and Sony, require ISBNs; others, like Kindle and Nook, don't. If you buy one from Bowkers, you will get:



- ▶ Listings in Bowkers' *Books in Print*
- ▶ Replacement of the print edition ISBN
- ▶ Search terms set up (SEO – Search Engine Optimization)
- ▶ Expanded promotion at a future date with electronic widgets
- ▶ Distribution to Apple and Sony

You can buy a single ISBN for \$125, or a premium one for \$185, or buy 10 at a time for \$250. Since I had eight books, I bought the block of ten. I assign them as I create the electronic versions. Assigning them is a bit of a pain (Bowkers' interface is not the easiest to deal with), but it's been worth the \$25 for each ISBN. Although I'm publishing with Smashwords, I didn't want to be locked in to having them listed as my publisher, so I didn't opt for their free ISBN offer.

Buying the ISBN is only the first step. It isn't actually in use until it's applied to a book. [Details for setting up and activating an ISBN](#) are on my site. It usually takes a day or two to get this set up, so do this before you submit your book to Kindle, Nook, and Smashwords.

Let me point out here that there is an alternative to using existing means of publishing. An option to consider is forming a small publishing co-op with friends. You can share the costs of ISBNs, and the co-op is listed as the publisher. Before starting the process to upload your book, there are two other decisions to make: How much do you want to charge? Do you want to put on DRM? We'll pick up on that topic next issue in Part II.

*Award-winning author Shannon Donnelly has written Regency romances, novellas, young-adult horror stories, and computer games. She is currently working on a historical novel rewrite and finishing two new proposals for paranormal romances. She can be found online at [sd-writer.com](http://sd-writer.com) and [twitter.com/sdwriter](http://twitter.com/sdwriter).*

## Nink FeedBackLoop

I'm trying something new here. From time to time, these "FeedBackLoops" will appear in *Nink*; the results will show up in later issues. Call it a mini-challenge, a race for the cure for writer's block, a 5K run to fire the imagination. It's voluntary, and meant to be fun while getting the synapses to fire in a different direction. Or not.

This inaugural edition is a riff on something you've seen before but perhaps never done: the shortest of short stories. In its various iterations, this exercise is called "hint fiction" or sometimes "flash fiction," but is probably best known as "the six-word memoir." Ernest Hemingway is attributed to be the (possible) founder and author of the most well-known of the ... genre? His contribution: "For sale. Baby shoes. Never worn."

Robert Swartwood edited *Hint Fiction*, an anthology of contemporary authors' stories limited to 25 words. Some of my favorites from that collection are J. Matthew Zoss' story titled *Houston, We Have a Problem*: "I'm sorry, but there's not enough air in here for everyone. I'll tell them you were a hero." And Joe R. Lansdale's story *The Return*: "They buried him deep. Again."

A few years ago, *Wired* magazine challenged fantasy, horror, and science fiction writers from a variety of media to come up with their own batch of six-word stories. Some of my favorites from that article are:

- "Machine. Unexpectedly, I'd invented a time" — Alan Moore
- "Longed for him. Got him. Shit." — Margaret Atwood
- "With bloody hands, I say good-bye." — Frank Miller
- "It's behind you! Hurry before it" — Rockne S. O'Bannon
- "The baby's blood type? Human, mostly." — Orson Scott Card
- "Kirby had never eaten toes before." — Kevin Smith
- "Easy. Just touch the match to" — Ursula K. Le Guin
- "Epitaph: He shouldn't have fed it." — Brian Herbert
- "Metrosexuals notwithstanding, quiche still lacks something." — David Brin
- "Will this do (lazy writer asked)?" — Ken MacLeod

So my challenge to all NINCers is this: come up with your own story in a maximum of eight words. There's no time limit, no prize, no rules (other than the eight word max), and no limit to how many you can send me. Send them to me at [Marianna@MariannaJameson.com](mailto:Marianna@MariannaJameson.com). I'll compile them and print them in upcoming issues. Have fun!

— Marianna Jameson

# NINC Bulletin Board

COMPILED BY SUSAN LYONS

Do you have info  
for the Bulletin Board?

Send it to Susan at  
susan@susanlyons.ca

## *Adventures at the NINC Website*

The hair of the dog? Seriously? Most people know that the expression refers to using alcohol to treat a hangover (a remedy that has not been proven to work!). Do you know where the expression originated? In the old belief that, if you had rabies or any other disease caused by a dog bite, the cure was to place a hair of that offending dog in the wound (I'm guessing that cure hasn't been proven to work either). Where did I learn this fascinating bit of trivia? In the amazing MedTerms Medical Dictionary at MedicineNet.com – one of the many resources you can find on the Members Only Reference page of the NINC website.

## *Volunteer in 2011*

The Volunteers Job List needs a Chair. If you are interested, please contact Donna Fletcher.

## *What's Going On with Other Writers' Organizations*

*Note: The following is provided for member information and does not constitute an endorsement by NINC of the organizations or activities.*

- ▶ **SleuthFest** – March 3-6; Deerfield Beach, FL. SleuthFest, sponsored by the Florida Chapter of Mystery Writers of America, is Florida's premier mystery writing conference. Guests of honor are Dennis Lehane and Meg Gardiner, and Thursday Spotlight Speaker is S.J. Rozan. Third Degree Thursday has been expanded, with more hands-on workshops for writers of all levels and several sessions of in-depth manuscript critiques. Each day also has a full track devoted to Forensics. More information about the conference is available at <http://www.sleuthfest.com>. (Julie Compton)
- ▶ **Writing With Style** – April 17-23; Banff, Canada; a unique opportunity for writers of all levels to participate in a week-long workshop at The Banff Centre, a setting for artists that is both inspiring and productive. Deadline: February 15. For info: <http://www.banffcentre.ca/writing/>
- ▶ **Whidbey Island Writers Conference** – April 1-3; Coupeville, WA. For info: <http://www.writeonwhidbey.com/conference/>
- ▶ **Pikes Peak Writers Conference** – April 29-May 1; Colorado Springs, CO; "Blaze the Write Trail." For info: <http://www.pikespeakwriters.com/html/ppwc.html>
- ▶ **Creativity Workshops** in NYC (March and June), Crete (June/July), Barcelona (July), Florence (July). For info: <http://www.creativityworkshop.com/>

## *NINC Blog*

NINC's blog is a large part of our online presence and a great way to promote your work. Please sign up to blog by going to the YahooGroups NINC Calendar. We also feature industry professionals, so pass along suggestions – e.g., your own agent, editor, publicist, website designer, cover artist, etc.

— **Patricia Rosemoor**

## *NINC on Facebook*

Don't forget we're on Facebook, too. Please visit often and share your news and ideas. Let's make it a happening place!

# Not Your Usual Writing Advice — Using Feng Shui for Career Success – Part I I

BY JOANN GROTE



*“Change means movement. Movement means friction.”*  
— Saul Alinsky

When I got the go-ahead to write a series of articles on practicing Feng Shui for career success, I decided to try it myself.

Six years ago I went from life as a divorced, childless woman to life with Joe and his two children. When I did, my computer became their computer. I was glad to share it, happy to be part of a family. But the first thing I did regarding Feng Shui with my career in mind was reclaim my desk. I found new places for family member items that had taken over my space. The family is still welcome to use my computer—when I’m not using it—but my desk space is my own. Once I had my space back, I put a framed copy of my top-selling book beside my computer screen, and I gave a writing award I won a prominent place.

Before long an editor I didn’t know contacted me about writing for his publisher. I chose not to make that move, but I found the “coincidence” intriguing.

I read a couple of books on Feng Shui, and began making discoveries and changes using a Bagua map, a basic Feng Shui tool. It breaks a house, room, desk top—any space you are dealing with—into nine equal areas, each related to specific areas of life. I started by looking at the whole house.

It shouldn’t have surprised me to discover that our kitchen is located in the Career section of our first floor. My desk is in the Fame and Reputation area of the home; there’s no place for my desk or an office atmosphere in the Creativity or Career areas. I have little trouble writing nonfiction at my desk, but writing fiction there is like walking through molasses. I’ve often moved to the kitchen table with my Alpha Smart when working on fiction. Another coincidence?

Like Kay Hooper, I see Feng Shui as a method of working with intent. (See last month’s column for Kay’s experiences with Feng Shui.) When I place an item in a certain area with the intent of improving my career, I’m reminded of that intent every time I see the item, and my determination to work on that intent increases. Is that a form of Feng Shui “magic,” or is it practical? However it works, I now know where the Career area of our home is located, so I hung a framed book cover on the Creativity section of the kitchen wall to strengthen my intention to put positive energy into my career.

When I compared the Bagua map to the second floor of our house, I was shocked. Our storage room fills the Career area. This is also where we feed our cats and keep their litter boxes. Those boxes were right in the Wealth and Prosperity area of the room. I couldn’t begin cleaning out and rearranging that room fast enough!

Some nice changes began happening. I attended NINC’s conference in St. Pete last October and sponged up a lot of great information. I met some other writers who, like myself, are in the midst of making changes in their careers. We agreed to be each others’ encouragers and critique each others’ work. Night Owl sessions helped me identify my writing strengths and re-focus my direction. I returned eager to work on my manuscript, and with new insights into how I want to do that.

And an editor surprised me with an unsolicited invitation to submit a manuscript in the new area my writing is headed.

Then life intervened.

“When you stir up energy,” Kay Hooper said, “it’s not necessarily going to be all good—or at least seem that way at the time.”

That certainly described my situation. Suddenly outside demands bombarded me—demands by people and in areas I feel least able to refuse—and took me away from my writing. I’m talking about weeks of time helping relatives in one way or another. For me, family has always come before work. Mostly I believe this is a good thing, but like all good things, it

can be overdone. Did my intention, and use of Feng Shui, to improve my career create circumstances that highlight a major issue that's blocking me, i.e. my lack of boundaries and/or poor defense of those boundaries?

One of the principles of Feng Shui is that our external environment reflects the barriers and the invitations to what we want in life. The barriers and invitations are inside us. The external barriers and invitations are only symbols, sometimes pointing us toward barriers and invitations we unconsciously raise. When one decides to improve an area of one's life, the only way to make it happen in any substantial and lasting manner is to deal with the inner conflicts that have prevented improvement in the past.

I'm working on the boundaries issue, learning to say "No" and "I'll be glad to help after my scheduled writing is completed," and "I'll do this much, but you will need to do that part." I'm reminded that if my career isn't given enough time and energy, the benefits of it aren't available to help the family!

Along the way, I'm continuing to Feng Shui. And write.

*JoAnn Grote is the award winning author of 38 books, including inspirational romances, middle grade historical novels and children's non-fiction. Contact her at jaghi@rconnect.com.*

**Editor's note:** If you're interested in researching Feng Shui on your own or even giving it a try, JoAnn and Kay recommend the following books as good for beginners: *The Western Guide to Feng Shui* and *The Western Guide to Feng Shui Room by Room*, both by Terah Kathryn Collins (Hay House) ([www.westernschooloffengshui.com](http://www.westernschooloffengshui.com)), and "anything by Lillian Too," who has written more than 80 books on Feng Shui ([www.lillian-too.com](http://www.lillian-too.com)). And if you do decide to employ elements of Feng Shui in your life and/or workspace, let us know how it goes! We'd love to hear about any lucky breaks, happy coincidences, or interesting changes that come your way. — Marianna



## Out of the [Little Black] Box: New Ideas for Promoting Books

MediaBistro's second eBook Summit took place in December and among the gleanings lurk some promotion-related gems that offer authors new ways of pushing their books through the digital thicket.

Scott Weisenthal, from Off the Bookshelf, suggested using social networking sites for book promotion and said readers frequently look to their friends rather than bestseller lists when looking for a book recommendation. Providing people with experiences that reach them on a personal level is important, he said, and is achieved by giving them high-quality writing that has a distinctive voice.

Rob Macdonald, from Scribd, offered very simple advice: "Make it easy for your content to be found."

Debbie Stier, formerly Senior Vice President, Director of Digital Marketing, and Editor-at-Large for HarperCollins and founder of the HarperCollins Speakers Bureau, recommended that authors think of ways to use mobile devices. Taking a close look at how and why Foursquare grew and how even food trucks are using Twitter to inform customers of their locations in real time, she suggested, could be reworked by authors. Devising ways to capitalize on the locations in their books could be one possibility, and think of what it might do for the numbers at a booksigning, to be able to let fans know you're in the neighborhood.

Elsewhere at the Summit, authors and new media experts had other ideas. As if in a riff on Stier's thoughts, a whole new way of engaging readers was tossed into the new media fray by the launch of Broadcastr. This "storytelling app" that allows people to "record audio versions of location-specific stories around the globe" made its debut at the Summit. Launched in late December by Andy Hunter and Scott Lindenbaum, co-founders of *Electric Literature*, Broadcastr has been described as being "Foursquare for storytellers." Broadcastr links audio recordings to a specific location via a map-based interface. When listeners enter that location, they will hear the story. Imagine the possibilities for novelists. It takes the idea of a book trailer into a new dimension.

In an interview with Jason Boog at the Summit, Tim Ferriss, best-selling author of *The 4-Hour Body* and *The 4-Hour Work Week*, talked about his off-beat promotion ideas. When facing the question of identifying your target audience and market, Ferriss suggested going "an inch wide and a mile deep, not vice-versa." He explained that the marketing plan for his first book, *The 4-Hour Work Week*, included spending most of his budget going to conferences where he could "meet tech thought leaders in person." He suggested that writers shouldn't try to "write for everyone. ...It's really as simple as that. We're at the dawn of the creators' age, when you don't have to dumb down your material to have a bestseller; you don't have to kowtow to big media that wants to dilute your message so that it offends no one and interests no one. The publisher—you—can decide the fate of your ideas. That's should be exciting to every writer and would-be writer out there. The timing couldn't be better."

*Information and quotes for this article came from GalleyCat, with additional input from the Nink editor.*

# The Mad Scribbler

By Laura Resnick



## Speak to Us!

*“I had the most expensive meal of my life today: breakfast at the airport..”*  
— Elaine Boosler, comedienne

So one day you get a friendly invitation out of the blue to speak at an event. However, after several email exchanges you realize you're being invited to drive 200 miles round-trip to teach a workshop... by an event organizer who balks at the prospect of covering your gas expenses, paying you an honorarium, or even buying you lunch.

Or perhaps you receive a speaking invitation from a group that's offering all expenses covered and a generous honorarium... but the person who contacts you is so inexperienced (or flaky) that he doesn't *tell* you any of that, and every single piece of relevant information must be laboriously extracted from him in a time-consuming series of email exchanges.

After more than 20 years of having (and hearing about) all sorts of focus-draining, wallet-emptying, time-wasting, and needlessly conflicted experiences with organizers who invite writers to speak at their events, I finally got tired of asking the same questions and offering the same explanations over and over. I also got tired of realizing that I had just completely wasted my time in doing so (ex. discovering after multiple emails that the invitation was based on the organizers' erroneous assumption that I would fly 2,000 miles at my own expense to speak at their event); or tired of discovering that I should have been ruthlessly specific when confirming arrangements (ex.: “Please don't put me in the position of wandering around your event asking who has my honorarium check.”).

I've also realized over the years that organizers who approach me seldom know more about me than, “Someone on our Board liked your last book,” or, “My critique partner saw you speak somewhere and said you were terrific.” Which means it would probably help things roll more smoothly if I explain up front what I do and don't do, what I expect or require, and what I guarantee or acknowledge.

Therefore I recently drafted a document that I can send in reply to speaking invitations, attached to a cover letter which I've also drafted for this purpose. The document contains the following information:

- ▶ My “Guidelines for Event Participation” (included in this issue of *Nink*)
- ▶ My bio as a writer and a speaker
- ▶ Reviews of my books
- ▶ Endorsements from previous speaking engagements
- ▶ A description of workshops I offer

The “Guidelines for Participation” cover my requirements and expectations; the rest of those items cover, in effect, what requirements and expectations I can fulfill.

I would never choose the time-sink, stress, and expense of legal action rather than just eating the aggravation and costs of a mismanaged speaking engagement. So the “Guidelines” document isn't intended to be legally binding or probative. Its purpose is to clarify to event planners, “This is what you're getting into by inviting me to speak. If these specifications seem reasonable to you, then let's pursue this. If not, then let's not waste any more of each other's time.”

I can also refer back to these guidelines if/when misunderstandings arise. If, for example, I receive an airplane ticket for an itinerary I never agreed to, which has me landing in a strange city at midnight, I can point back to clause 3 (c) in the document, which specifically states that I won't go along with this. In which case, I would consider it perfectly fair to advise the organizers they'll need to swallow the expense of exchanging or replacing that ticket.

The various clauses in these guidelines arise from negative experiences that I don't want to have again, positive experiences that I want to make standard in my engagements, and things which I've learned I need to clarify for event planners. It also contains a few new standards I've realized I'm ready to set; and if those terms aren't accepted, then no offense intended, but I think I'd rather stay home.

For example, airport parking, the new baggage-handling fees, and ground transportation typically cost me \$50-\$100 when I fly. I've recently decided that if these travel expenses aren't covered by event organizers, then I probably don't want to accept their invitation (though, frankly, it depends on the venue; if you invite me to San Diego in March, you've got more leverage than if you invite me to Buffalo in January). This is because I've decided I don't want to go out-of-pocket anymore to speak at events; nor do I consider it reasonable to be expected to use my honorarium (which supposedly compensates my work) for travel expenses to get to/from the event where I'm working.

Early in my career, I was flattered to be asked to participate in event programming. I also believed I got professional benefits from attending and appearing at various events. Therefore, I was typically willing to cover many of my own expenses when I was a speaker. Now, however, I'm not still flattered enough to spend my own money on speaking engagements, and I no longer feel I benefit much from them professionally. In fact, my own consistent experience has been that rather than increasing my readership, what I mostly get out of speaking events is more speaking invitations, via people who've attended my sessions. So public speaking could turn into a fiscal *drain* for me if I didn't set guidelines to ensure that I come out at least even when I speak at events, if not necessarily ahead.

Also, I'm convinced (and so are my long-suffering editors) that the most valuable thing I can do for my career these days is write faster. So I don't have much professional incentive to disrupt my writing schedule with public speaking. Consequently, for example, if event organizers prefer to save money by booking me on a connecting flight rather than paying for a non-stop ticket, thus adding hours, stress, and potential delays to my travel time... then no hard feelings, but I should probably just stay home and write. Hence clause 3(a) of my guidelines.

Clauses 5(b) and 5(c) explain what I do and do not charge an honorarium for. However, my guidelines deliberately do not list speaking fees (nor does my website).

One reason for this is that some organizers are experienced and professional enough to work out what fee (and, indeed, what terms) they can offer me before contacting me. If their proposal is reasonable, I'll accept the invitation. And if it's marginal but there are other aspects of the event that appeal to me, then instead of declining, I'll probably propose speaking content that suits their budget. (For example, I have one workshop in my repertoire that's so demanding to present, I'd rather not do it unless I'm being paid well; but I have another that I'm willing to do for a modest sum.) Also, I have occasionally been surprised by unexpectedly high offers from venues that happen to have good funding available at the time.

However, many speaking invitations don't include an offer. In fact, many evade the subject of money altogether, putting me in the position of having to bring it up. So I usually start the ball rolling by saying that before I can respond to their invitation, I need to know what expenses they're covering and what sort of honorarium they're offering. This is where you sometimes discover they're making a perfectly reasonable offer and, er, they just forgot to mention it when asking you to fly 1,200 miles to speak at their event. Alternately, sometimes the correspondence immediately ceases, without reply, response, or acknowledgment. (And, well, good riddance to people with manners like that.) And sometimes the response is, "What's your speaking fee?"

If they've asked me to do something that falls under 5(c) in my guidelines, i.e. program items for which I require an honorarium, then I usually say my fee is \$300 for a half-day (or one workshop) and \$500 for a whole day (or two workshops). I consider these sums an attractive yet reasonable compensation for the time and demands involved in preparing and presenting a speech or a workshop. (Years ago, when I was more eager to participate in events than I am now, I would name a lower figure. So this is based on individual preference, not a one-size-fits-all answer.)

A couple of times, organizers have responded by agreeing to that sum and paying it. A few other times, the correspondence has immediately ceased, without reply, response, or acknowledgment. (And, again, good riddance to bad manners.) Most times, though, the organizers *then* make the effort to work out their budget and tell me what they can pay me, and we negotiate. (Ex. If they offer \$150 and want me to work the whole day, then perhaps I'll counter by offering to do one workshop and a Q&A for that sum plus travel expenses. And so on.)

Just as many people don't understand that writing is a profession, many people also don't think in professional terms when asking a writer to come speak. Sometimes it may well be appropriate for you to humor that (ex. a re-

quest from your daughter's Girl Scout troop). But when there *isn't* a reason to humor that perspective, I hope that my giving someone this document will resolve that problem much more efficiently than trying to explain (sometimes to an unreceptive audience) why I won't, for example, drive 200 miles round-trip at my own expense to teach a workshop for free.

*So far, no one has asked Laura Resnick to speak anywhere in 2011. Perhaps word has leaked out about her infamous guidelines...*

# Laura Resnick's Guidelines for Event Participation

## 1. Transit Expenses:

For any distance further from my home (Cincinnati, Ohio) than 30 miles, the organizers of the event agree to cover my driving expenses or flying expenses as specified below. I prefer to drive to any event within 200 miles of my home, and to fly to any event further than 300 miles away. (Between 200–300 miles, it varies.)

## 2. Driving Expenses:

I will submit receipts (or photocopies of the receipts) and an expense report for reimbursement after the event. I will not expect reimbursement for cash expenses for which I neglected to get a receipt, but I will expect a credit-card record to suffice for expenses wherein I neglected to get a receipt.

### Driving Expenses:

Round trip gasoline costs for driving to/from the event

Road tolls incurred driving to/from the event

Parking expenses associated with the event

## 3. Air Travel Expenses:

(a) The event organizers agree to book me on a non-stop flight if there is a non-stop route between the departure and destination cities; if not, then the event organizers agree to book me on the most-direct route possible.

(b) The event organizers agree to purchase and pay for the air ticket directly from the vendor, and to supply me with an e-ticket.

(c) The event organizers (or their travel agent/representative) agree to consult me on the itinerary before booking and paying for my air travel. The organizers recognize that I am not obliged to accept a travel schedule whose flight times I have not agreed upon prior to purchase.

(d) I reserve the right to schedule my travel to include additional time in the destination city, before or after the event. I acknowledge that, if I do so, the organizers have no absolute obligations, fiscal or otherwise, with regard to this additional time. I also agree to cooperate with the organizers (or their travel agent/representative) to schedule such additional time so that it doesn't increase the cost of my air ticket.

(e) For all air travel expenses (as defined here below) other than the air ticket itself, I will submit receipts (or photocopies of the receipts) and an expense report for reimbursement after the event. I will not expect reimbursement for cash expenses for which I neglected to get a receipt, but I will expect a credit-card record to suffice for expenses wherein I neglected to get a receipt.

Air travel expenses:

Airfare to/from the event

Airport parking fees in departure city

Airport shuttle services in destination city (or other transportation between hotel and airport)

Air travel luggage fees for one checked bag

#### 4. Hotel Expenses:

For a one-day-only event, I do not require hotel accommodation as long as the event is within 100 miles of my home *and* the hours of the event ensure that same-day travel is reasonable. For all events further from my home than 100 miles, I will need hotel accommodation.

(a) For any event where I stay overnight, the organizers of the event agree to cover the cost of my hotel room. The number of hotel-room nights will be agreed upon on the basis of event and travel scheduling.

(b) The organizers of the event agree to pay the hotel directly for my room. The organizers recognize that if, upon arrival, I am advised by hotel staff that I am expected to pay for my room and then await subsequent reimbursement, I will not participate in the event until/unless this oversight is corrected.

(c) I agree to pay for all hotel room incidentals myself (ex. phone calls, room service, mini-bar, tipping, etc.).

(d) The organizers agree to book me into a comfortable, well-maintained hotel that is convenient to the event. If transportation is needed between the hotel and the event, the organizers agree to make reliable arrangements for me, or to provide me with the practical means (ex. instructions and/or cash) to make such arrangements myself.

#### 5. Speaking Fee or Honorarium:

My general terms for working in event programming are:

(a) I decline to read, edit, critique, or evaluate anyone's writing, regardless of how short the sample is. The event organizers agree not to schedule me for any such sort of session, exercise, or event.

(b) I participate in panel discussions with other speakers/guests, casual Q&As with audiences, interviews, readings, chat-withs, end-of-event wrap-up discussions, etc. I do not require compensation for participating in these sorts of sessions because, from my perspective, they don't require time-consuming preparation and are not demanding to present.

(c) I teach prepared workshops and give formal speeches. Fees are negotiable, but I do require compensation for this category of sessions because, from my perspective, they require time-consuming preparation and are demanding to present.

(d) If the organizers can't offer an honorarium, then the need for a speaking fee can be eliminated by inviting me to participate only in the type of sessions 5(b) for which compensation is not required.

(e) If an honorarium is being offered for my participation, the event organizers agree to render it to me upon my arrival at the event. The organizers recognize that if the honorarium is not available, I will not participate in the event until/unless this oversight is corrected.

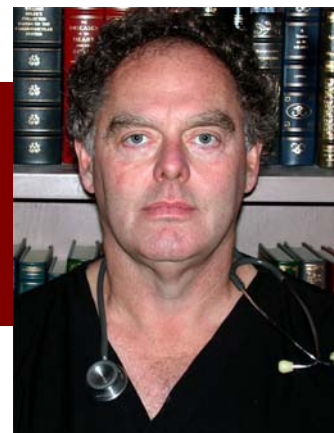
## Did you "Due"? If Not, this is your Last Issue.

Did you already renew your membership, fill out the Authors Coalition Survey, and pay your dues so you won't miss out on a single issue of *Nink* nor a packet of bytes from Ninc-link nor access to the website? Nor attending the best writers' conference around? What're you waiting for? Do your "Due." And keep yourself and NINC writer-strong.



# Forensic Files

By D. P. Lyle, MD



## What are “Date Rape Drugs” and how do they work?

The major “date rape drugs” are Rohypnol (flunitrazepam), Ecstasy (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine), GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate), and Ketamine (Ketamine Hydrochloride).

Ecstasy, GHB, and Ketamine are commonly found at Raves—all-night dance parties that attract huge crowds of teens and young adults. The Rave Culture has its own music, dress, and drug use patterns. According to many Ravers, these drugs seem to enhance the rave experience. This is especially true if the drug is taken with alcohol.

Rohypnol, GHB, and Ketamine are commonly used in “Date” or “Acquaintance” rapes. They cause sedation, a degree of compliance, poor judgment, and amnesia for events that occur while under their influence. It is this that makes them “effective” in date rape situations. A small amount of GHB or Rohypnol can be slipped into the victim’s drink in a bar or at a party. She may appear no different, but may leave with her assailant because judgment is impaired and euphoria is enhanced. Only later will she realize that something happened, but her memory of events may be spotty or absent.

With any of these drugs, users may act, talk, and appear normal to those around them. Or they might seem happy, excited, pleasantly sedated, or intoxicated. Or the victim may become “drunk” quickly, develop slurred speech, and, of course, must be “put to bed.” Or driven home. Or robbed. Or murdered. Either way, they don’t put up much of a fight. The reaction varies from person to person.

Let’s look closer at these drugs.

**Rohypnol** (Street Names: Roofies, Roaches, Rope, Mexican Valium) is a benzodiazepine sedative in the same family as Valium and was developed to treat insomnia. Currently, the drug is neither manufactured nor approved for use in the US, but is available in Mexico and many other countries. It is manufactured as white, one and two milligram tablets that can be crushed and dissolved in any liquid. Going rate on the street is about \$5 a tablet. It takes action 20 to 30 minutes after ingestion, peaks in about two hours, and its effects may persist for eight to 12 hours.

Roofies typically cause sedation, confusion, euphoria, loss of identity, dizziness, blurred vision, slowed psychomotor performance, and amnesia. The victim has poor judgment, a feeling of sedated euphoria, and poor, if any, memory of events. Victims may suddenly “wake up” or “reenter reality” hours later with vague or no memory of what has happened. Rarely, Rohypnol can cause anger and aggressive behavior.

**Ecstasy** (Street Names: E, X, XTC, MDMA, Love, Adam) was originally patented in 1914 as an appetite suppressant but was never marketed. It is made in underground labs and distributed in pill or capsule form. It has amphetamine (speed-like) as well as hallucinogenic effects. The user has enhanced sensations and feelings of empathy, a mood lift, increased energy, and occasionally profound spiritual experiences or an equally profound and irrational fear reaction. It may cause increased blood pressure, teeth grinding (bruxia), sweating, nausea, anxiety, or panic attacks. Rare cases of death from malignant hyperthermia (sudden and marked elevation of body temperature to 106, 108, or above, which basically “fries” the brain) have been reported.

Now the confusing part. Both MDMA and GHB are sometimes referred to by the slang term Ecstasy, though they are very different compounds. The street purchaser doesn’t always know which he is getting. Even if he receives the drug from a “friend,” who is to say where the friend obtained it? Likely from a friend of a friend. The bottom line is that it was probably cooked up in a garage by someone of unknown expertise, marginal experience, questionable drug habits, and a chemistry book.

**GHB** (Street Names: G, XTC, E, Liquid Ecstasy, Liquid E, Easy Lay, Goop, Scoop, Georgia Homeboy) was developed over 30 years ago and was sold as a “natural” food supplement and muscle builder. It comes as a white powder that easily dissolves in water, alcohol, and other liquids. Currently, it is often found as “Liquid E,” a colorless, odorless liquid that is sold in small vials and bottles for \$5 to \$10.

The effects of GHB appear quickly, five to 20 minutes after ingestion, and typically last for two to three hours. It causes loss of inhibitions, euphoria, drowsiness, and, when combined with alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, and many other drugs, increases the effects of these drugs. Many kids use it to enhance the effect of alcohol for a “cheap drunk.” Users report that GHB makes them feel happy, sensual, and talkative. They may experience giddiness, drowsiness, amnesia, an increased ▶

sense of well-being, enhanced sensuality, and sometimes hallucinations.

Ketamine (Street Names: K, Special K, Kit-Kat, Purple, Bump) is a rapid acting intravenous or intramuscular, therefore injectable, anesthetic agent, which causes sedation and amnesia. It was a common surgical anesthetic agent in the 1970's but fell from favor in part due to its unpredictable hallucinogenic and psychiatric side effects. It is still occasionally used medically in burn victims since it tends to "dissociate" the patient from the pain, making the intense discomfort of burns more bearable. It is popular in veterinary medicine as an animal sedative, leading to another popular street name, Cat Valium. Ketamine that appears on the street is often stolen from animal hospitals and clinics. Sometimes at gunpoint.

A newcomer on the drug scene, Ketamine comes as a liquid, which when injected acts as a general anesthetic. It is often heated in a microwave or on a stovetop to evaporate the liquid, leaving behind a white powder residue. Some users employ the heater in their cars to accomplish the same result. The powder can be added to a liquid, compacted into pills, or snorted, which is the preferred and most common method of usage. It is rapidly absorbed through the GI tract after ingestion or if "snorted" through the membranes of the nose. Special K goes for \$10 to \$20 a dose. When "snorted," it takes effect almost immediately and is fairly short in its duration of action. Forty-five minutes to an hour or two.

Many of its effects are similar to Ecstasy, but it also possesses "dissociative" effects, which means the person "dissociates" from reality in some fashion. Often the user experiences hallucinations, loss of time sense, and loss of self-identity. One common form is a "depersonalization syndrome" where the person is part of the activities while at the same time is off to the side or hovering overhead watching the activity, including his/her own actions. Users call these effects "going into a K Hole." I would suspect a K Hole is similar to Alice's Rabbit Hole, where time, space, and perceptions become distorted. This reaction is also common with PCP (Phencyclidine, Angel Dust), which was popular in the 1970's and 80's.

Since Ketamine is a sedative and general anesthetic, its potential for serious and lethal effects is real. If too much is taken, the victim can lose consciousness, stop breathing, and suffer brain damage or die.

Using these drugs is a proverbial "crap-shoot." The quality and purity are variable even with the pharmaceutically manufactured Rohypnol and Ketamine since they are often "stepped-on" or mixed with other drugs by the time they reach the street. Thus, the user neither knows what drugs nor exactly what amounts he is ingesting. And since reactions vary widely from person to person and are unpredictable, it takes a huge leap of faith to use these dangerous chemicals. Unfortunately, many young people are willing to perform just such self experimentation.

Each of these drugs can be found with toxicological testing if such testing is done. Since Ecstasy is a type of amphetamine it will show up on almost any hospital or coroner's drug screen. It will appear as an amphetamine and then further testing will reveal that the particular amphetamine present is indeed Ecstasy. The others must be tested for specifically.

Tox testing is not done in all autopsies. It's up to the coroner or ME whether such expensive testing is done or not. Drug screens are typically fast and cheap but specific testing with things such as Gas Chromatography and Mass Spectroscopy (GC/MS) is expensive. The ME has a budget to follow and this budget doesn't often allow for a lot of unnecessary testing. This means it isn't routinely done. But if the ME was presented with an unexplained death, particularly in a young and healthy individual, or if the evidence revealed the victim had been at a rave or had behaved oddly prior to death, he might press ahead with more complete tox testing.

In chronic users, these drugs, particularly GHB, can be found in the user's hair. This isn't as useful for a single use or an acute poisoning since only the hair that is formed while the drug levels are elevated within the bloodstream would contain the drug. A few hours of intoxication isn't going to do this but repeated use over weeks or months will.

Website: The Writers Medical and Forensics Lab at <http://www.dplylemd.com/>

Blog: The Writer's Forensics Blog at <http://writersforensicsblog.wordpress.com/>

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## *Business Briefs*

### **Print or Not**

The Book Industry Study Group's latest survey, Student Attitudes Toward Content in Higher Education, claims 75% of the college age students surveyed preferred textbooks in print format instead of digital. The reasoning did include the fact they can resell the print copies. Some additional stats of interest: 40 percent purchased from pirate sites, 20 percent purchased from Amazon, and 11 percent rented. BISG intends to present the results at "What College Students Think: Making Information Pay for Higher Ed Publishing" in early February, and it is also available at <http://www.bisg.org/events-0-615-mip-for-higher-ed-publishing.php>. This is the potential market group for eBooks?



## **WRITING is TAXING**

*By Diane Kelly*

# **To Err is Human . . . But it Might Cost You Some Money**

The IRS recently released a report summarizing the most common errors made on 2009 tax returns. Separate data was provided for returns prepared by taxpayers versus those prepared by professional tax preparers. The report may be useful in preventing errors on your 2010 return. The information may also help you discern whether you might have made an error or missed out on a tax benefit you were entitled to in 2009.

### **Returns Prepared by the Taxpayer.**

The most common errors included:

- 1) failing to claim the Making Work Pay credit or incorrectly computing the credit. See Schedule M and the instructions for information on this credit, which was a newly enacted credit for the 2009 and 2010 tax years only.
- 2) reporting the incorrect amount of tax due for the taxable income and filing status. If you use the tax tables, be sure to use the appropriate column for your filing status.
- 3) math errors, particularly in deducting the standard deduction and personal exemption amounts. Be sure to double check your math!
- 4) failing to claim the additional standard deduction available to taxpayers who are age 65 or older or blind. If you turn 65 on or before January 1 of the following year, you get an additional standard deduction amount for the current year. Yep, you read that right. Those born on January 1<sup>st</sup> are treated as if they had their birthday by the preceding year's end. See the Form 1040 instructions for a worksheet that will help you compute the additional standard deduction amount.
- 5) incorrectly computing the taxable amount of Social Security benefits. Up to 85% of Social Security benefits may be taxable. The amount subject to income tax depends on the amount of the taxpayer's other income. The Form 1040 instructions contain a worksheet to assist taxpayers in computing the taxable portion of their Social Security benefits.
- 6) failing to apply the special tax rates to qualified dividends and certain capital gains. The Form 1040 instructions contain a worksheet to assist taxpayers in making this computation.
- 7) incorrectly computing education credits and student loan interest deductions. Be sure that Form 8863 is properly completed for education credits and that you've properly completed the worksheet in the Form 1040 instructions for the student loan interest deduction. See IRS Publication 970 for information on tax benefits for higher education. Be aware, however, that the Hope Credit is not available for the 2010 tax year. At the time this article was written, Publication 970 had not been updated to reflect this change in law.
- 8) incorrectly computing the health savings account deduction. Be sure to properly compute Form 8889. See Publication 969 for information about HSAs.

### **Returns Prepared by a Paid Professional.**

Errors on professionally prepared returns included many of the errors above, plus:

- 1) claiming the earned income tax credit when the taxpayer's age disqualified the taxpayer from the credit. A taxpayer must be at least 25 but less than 65 on December 31 of the tax year to qualify for the earned income tax credit.
- 2) names and Social Security numbers for dependents not matching. Be sure that your tax preparer has properly spelled all names and used the correct Social Security numbers.

## What to Do if There's an Error on Your Return.

In many cases, the IRS discovers errors and makes adjustments for the taxpayer, issuing either an additional refund or an assessment depending on whether the error is in the taxpayer's or government's favor. If the IRS does not discover an error, the taxpayer can file an amended return (Form 1040X) to make any necessary corrections.

If you receive an assessment from the IRS due to an error and can't pay the amount due immediately, you have the option of paying the assessment over time. Call the phone number on your notice, apply for an installment payment agreement online, or file Form 9465 by mail to request a payment plan. If your assessment includes penalties, be sure to ask for a waiver. If reasonable cause existed for your underpayment, the IRS may—and often does—waive the penalty. If your return was professionally prepared, be sure to point out to that you relied on professional advice and thus did not knowingly underreport your tax liability.

If your preparer made an error that results in you owing taxes, penalties, and interest to the IRS, it's fair to ask the preparer to pay any penalties the IRS won't waive. Interest is debatable. Preparers argue that since the taxpayer had the use of the funds that should have been paid in to the IRS, the taxpayer should pay any interest on the tax liability. Others argue that interest would not have been incurred had the preparer not erred and therefore the preparer should pay the interest. The tax preparer is not legally liable for any of the additional tax since the tax would have been owed regardless of the error. If your paid preparer erred, it may also be appropriate to ask for a refund of some or all of the preparer's fee, depending on how extensive the errors were.

## Be Aware of Changes in Tax Law for 2010.

- 1) You can no longer increase your standard deduction by real estate taxes or new motor vehicle taxes (unless the taxes paid in 2010 were for a vehicle purchased from February 17 – December 31, 2009).
- 2) If you sell your main home and have not lived in it continuously, your ability to exclude the gain from taxation may be limited. See IRS Publication 523.
- 3) If you claimed a first-time homebuyer credit for a home purchased in 2008, you must begin repaying the credit in 2010.
- 4) The limit on itemized deductions expired in 2010, but is scheduled to return in 2011 at lower income levels unless Congress takes further action.
- 5) Other changes may affect you. Be sure to read the "What's New" section of the Form 1040 instructions available at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).

*Diane Kelly, CPA/Attorney at Law, writes romantic mysteries for St. Martin's Press. Her debut novel, Death, Taxes, and a French Manicure, will be released in September 2011.*

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*Publishing Services by Huseby Agency, Ltd.*

**NINK** a publication of Novelists, Inc.  
An Organization for Writers of Popular Fiction  
P.O. Box 2037  
Manhattan KS 66505